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ABSTRACT

Commercial recreation is the provision of facilities, equipment, and programs that satisfy public demand for activities during unobligated time and are profitable to the supplier. The term "commercial recreation" has been given a negative connotation in the field of recreation and leisure. This negative concept of commercial recreation continues to influence present day recreation students and professions. Commercial recreation can be justified in two points, the economic aspect and the provision of services to the family. The service industry of the United States, which is currently growing rapidly and is predicted to grow even faster in the future, provides further examples of commercial recreation's importance. Recreation related jobs continue to grow in that area as they have in another commercial recreation field, travel and tourism. Commercial recreation provides many activities for family recreation in the United States. Examples include: the travel and tourism industry; ski resorts; and theme parks. A historical perspective on why commercial recreation has received such a negative image is provided. (JMK)

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THE HISTORY OF COMMERCIAL RECREATION AND ITS ROLE IN THE PROVISION OF FAMILY RECREATION

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Commercial recreation is the provision of facilities, equipment and programs that satisfy public demand for activities during unobligated time and are profitable to the supplier. This definition has several points that need to be emphasized. First, the provision of facilities, equipment and programs is necessary in order to cover the full range of commercial recreation endeavors. Facilities may include health clubs and fitness centers, ski resorts and ski lifts, to name a few. Second, running shoes for joggers, tennis racquets, racquet ball racquets, and baseball gloves are all prime examples of equipment used in the pursuit of recreational activities. Third, programs are those types of guided activities for which a person pays. Some commercial recreation programs may include river rafting trips, mountain backpacking trips, wilderness experiences, fitness centers, exercise programs, picnics and group parties, dances, arts and crafts sales, and horse camping. These activities should all be provided to the public and take place during a person's unobligated or non-work time. It's important to note that one definition of recreation is "an

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activity which takes place during an individual's unobligated time." The major difference between Commercial Recreation and other types of recreation is based upon facilities, equipment and programs being supplied to the public at a profit to the supplier. The profit motive is as critical to a commercial recreation enterprise as it is to any other business.

It has been apparent to me, for several years, that the term "commercial recreation" has been given a negative connotation in the field of recreation and leisure. How has this situation arisen? To find the answer, let's review the history of commercial recreation.

Commercial recreation had its beginnings when the Phonecians, in approximately 4,000 B.C., first developed the concept of money. Once this concept was accepted, trade took place. Travel, and the purchase of equipment and/or activities was an integral part of that trade. At this time one of the foremost aspects of commercial recreation, travel and tourism, proceeded to develop and grow. The Greeks and Romans were known to travel to many parts of the Roman Empire, including Egypt, on vacations. Royalty, through the dark and middle ages continued to travel. The less wealthy also had their forms of commercial recreation. Examples of these are fairs, crafts guilds, and traveling minstrel shows. These took place during the middle ages in most European countries and were accepted as suitable forms of

recreation. In fact, in our textbooks, we talk about them as prime examples of recreation. These examples are used to exemplify the point that recreation could not be stifled even during the dark ages. However, they were basically commercial enterprises.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, there are numerous instances of commercial recreation activities taking place in Europe and England. Exclusive resorts were known to have been developed during this time period. These resorts catered to the upper class. As time passed resorts were also developed for the less wealthy. During this time fairs and amusements were still popular and all forms of entertainment were taking place - the theatre was coming into its own. These were all legitimate forms of recreation.

How did commercial recreation receive its negative reputation? To begin with, the United States was populated by religious immigrants who based their entire philosophy and livelihood on their ability to work. This philosophy became known as the "Protestant work ethic." As a result of this ethic, all forms of recreation were considered evil - not just commercial recreation. Later, as the United States progressed, recreation became more widely accepted. An acceptance which continued through the late 1800's and early 1900's. During that time the industrial revolution also took place.

The industrial revolution brought about a drastic

change in the population of the United States. For the first time, people were leaving the rural areas and moving to the cities. As more and more people moved to the cities to work in the factories, crowding and social problems became evident. For example, between 1880 and 1900 in the city of New York, investigating committees found as many as 360 people, including 40 children, living in a single tenement building. As a result of crowding, the death rate for children under 5 was 325 per 1,000. The south side of Harlem, had the greatest population density in the world at this time. One 32 acre section had 9864 people living in it. Many of the tenements housed 26 families in a 5 to 7 story building about 25ft. wide and 100 ft. deep (Knapp, Aug., 1972.)

At this time, parks were of a formalized nature and quite often had "keep off the grass" signs which required children and/or adults to find their recreation elsewhere. Sports increased in popularity dramatically and, in the late 1800's, two of our national pastimes, football and basketball became popular and baseball achieved some of its prominence. In fact, the first news story reported by wireless radio was a sports event. However, due to the brutality of some of the sports, and the inaccessibility of sports participation for most of the population, participation rates were low. As one observer noted, "the general population used their leisure poorly on the vulgar

and commercialized streets" (Knapp, Oct., 1972.) The development of various commercial amusements ranged from legitimate theatre for the cultivated and affluent to vaudeville, movies, burlesque and sidewalk peep shows for the less affluent. In fact, Knapp, writing in an NRPA article for the Playground Association of American, indicated that "most middle and lower class residents had to depend upon commercial recreation for leisure activities outside the home" (Knapp, Oct., 1972.)

As can be seen from these comments, commercial recreation received its negative image early. What was the driving force creating the negative image of commercial recreation at the time? The late 1800's and early 1900's was a time of significant social reform. Due to crowding, a severe child labor situation, a high infant death rate and crowded living conditions for much of the population, a number of private groups concerned with social justices became prominent. These groups included such organizations as settlement houses and charity agencies which emphasized Christian ideals. In the case of commercial recreation, these organizations began to create a negative label that was not necessary accurate. These reformers' avenue of attack was mainly through the improvement of city government and humanitarian social service reforms. It was at this time that the recreation movement had its official beginning.

All of our textbooks mark the beginning of organized recreation with Jane Adams and her Hull House experiment. Settlement houses, such as Hull House, were a reflection of urban Christianity's response to the problems created by a large immigration population, saloons, family housing and amusements. Because of these social problems, adherents of social Christianity, working through the existing churches and religious settlements, tried to provide leadership in urban reform movements such as recreation. The result of these reforms included the development of such groups as the YMCA, the YWCA, the Boy Scouts, the Campfire Girls and other organizations.

Three men were prominent in propelling the recreation movement forward. One was Joseph Lee, the son of a wealthy Boston family who had received a tremendous sense of social responsibility during his childhood. While never spending much time dealing with religious matters, Joseph was strongly influenced by the Unitarianism of his father which emphasized God as truth, beauty and life.

Luther Gulick was the youngest son of a missionary family living in Hawaii. He received his M.D. degree and began to establish the YMCA training schools. He developed the majority of his ideas on physical education and recreation while working with the YMCA and saw a close relationship between body, mind and spirit. As a result of this, he designed the familiar triangle symbol of the YMCA.

The third person was Howard Braucher. Howard trained for a calling in the ministry when he attended Union Theological Seminary but upon completion of his studies, he decided to go into social work. In fact, he considered religion to be the leading motivator in teaching people how to view their lives.

These three individuals guided the organization and development of recreation during the early 1900's. Lee and Gulick were responsible for the establishment of the Playground Association of America in 1906 and Lee and Braucher were responsible for running that organized voice of recreation from its inception in 1906 to Braucher's death in 1949.

Given the strong religious background of these individuals and the social upheaval of the time, it is easy to see how they could construe commercial recreation to be evil and sinful. I am not saying that all commercial recreation was good nor is it now all "wholesome." However, it should be pointed out that the commercial recreation which existed uring the early 1900's was not all unwholesome either. In fact, two of the commercial recreation activities that were considered to be improper during that time period were amusement parks and vaudeville. Amusement parks were considered to be unwholesome areas mainly because they were developed by the trolley companies to increase revenues on the weekends. They were considered to be shabby and mere

wastes of time. I don't need to remind you that this industry has developed into the theme parks of today. Current counterparts of vaudeville would be theatre and television.

The concept of recreation created during its formative years continued throughout the careers of Braucher and Lee. For example, in 1914, the Playground and Recreation Association of America called for municipal control of all commercial recreation in an attempt to clean up commercial recreation. After World War I, during acute inflation, labor strikes, race riots, paranoia, etc, Lee identified the lack of proper use of leisure time, specifically commercial recreation, as the primary reason for the problems in society.

As late as the 1940's Howard Braucher refused to allow the National Industrial Recreation Association to become affiliated with the National Recreation Association because of his stand for equality for workers and management within business organizations. It is still a separate organization and its members are businessmen who provide recreation to the employees on a business basis in an attempt to show that the provision of recreation provides a profit for each participating company.

How has this negative concept of commercial recreation influenced the present day recreation student or professional? The answer is simple. We are still seeing a

number of current text books negatively refering to the concept of commercial recreation. Let me give some examples. Chubb & Chubb, in their 1981 textbook, when refering to the early years of recreation, indicated that "despite the fact that such municipal recreation services were said to reduce juvenile delinquency, citizens were worried about the effects, particularly on young people, of urban commercial recreation and its associated liquor and vice." In fact, the authors continue to state, "most of their efforts (referring to influential individuals and associations) were concentrated on helping the urban disadvantaged, and usually there was a strong moralistic attitude toward recreation or physical education activities. Provision of such programs was advocated primarily as a means of combatting any antisocial behavior such as drinking, gambling and juvenile delinquency. "Note the relationship between these statements and the previous reference to commercial recreation.

Miller and Robinson in their 1963 text, The Leisure Age, stated that "adults drifted toward a variety of inadequate and often undesirable forms of commercial amusement because of lack of any other forms and the absence of civic and community sponsorship of recreation. Commercial recreation was defined as being "dime museums, dance halls, shooting galleries, beer gardens, bowling alleys, music halls, billiard parlors, saloons and similar amusement resorts that made up the world of entertainment." Carlson's

text, Recreation and Leisure, printed in 1979, devoted a whole paragraph to unsavory commercial recreation, "Unwholesome commercial recreation opportunities foster the need for the replacement of more truly lucrative activities." The recreational activities noted were "dime novels, pool halls, billiard parlors, dime museums with (free contractions,) nickelodeons (which were the forerunners of today's cinemas,) shooting galleries, and saloons as well as vaudeville." Even spectator sports such as horseracing, professional baseball, and prize fighting were condemned as being unwholesome.

With quotes such as these and the positions that churches have taken in the development of social and recreational activities to improve the social welfare of individuals, can it be any wonder that commercial recreation has received such a bad connotation?

Now, commercial recreation can be justified on two points. The economic aspect and the provision of services to the family. The economic side of commercial recreation should be treated with respect. The field of commercial recreation has grown from revenues totaling approximately 58.3 billion dollars, in 1965, to revenues of 262 Billion dollars in 1982 (U.S. News and World Report, 1982.) These numbers, while impressive, are hard to fathom until you take into consideration the following facts. In 1972, 105 billion dollard was spent on commercial recreation,this amount

exceeded total corporate profits in the U.S (U.S. News and World Report, 1972.) In 1978, the 180 billion dollars spent on commercial recreation accounted for 1 out of every 8 dollars spent in the United States (U.S. News and World Report, Sept., 1980.) The 1981 figure of 244 billion dollars accounted for 9% of the net national product and 9 million jobs. In 1982 the figure of 262 billion dollars was almost 1 1/2 times greater than the total federal government outlay for national defense. This is an industry that is so large that it can only be described by considering the fact that if commercial recreation, as a whole, was considered to be one business, it would be second in size only to the U.S. food industry, which includes the growing, processing and selling of food within the U.S.

In order to put these numbers into perspective, consider the change from 1965 to 1982. Total commercial recreation spending has increased 4 times. This compares with total government spending on recreation over the same time period, 1965 - 1981, of just over 4 times, so the growth in the two industries has been approximately the same. However, in 1965 commercial recreation spending was 58.3 billion dollars, where total government spending on all recreation was 1.1 billion dollars. In 1983, commercial recreation had grown to 262 billion dollars while total government spending has increased to 8.2 billion dollars. Local city spending on recreation has only grown to a 1981

total of 3.4 billion dollars. The fact is that in 1980, the total government spending on recreation was only 3.7% of that spent on commercial recreation. Government spending is miniscule in comparison to public spending for commercial recreational activities (Statistical Abstracts of U.S., 1982.)

Total government revenues from recreation in 1980 amounted to 1.2 billion dollars or slightly more than 1/2 of a percent of the total public spending on commercial recreation. Is it any wonder that governments are beginning to become involved in charging fees for recreation? They are following the example set by the commercial recreation industry.

The service industry of the United States, which is currently growing rapidly and is predicted to grow even faster in the future, provides further examples of commercial recreation7s importance. In 1977 commercial recreation businesses accounted for 23% of the receipts of all service businesses. In addition, Forbes magazine has listed the leisure industry as being one of the top four industries from 1975-1979 (Forbes, 1979.) Specific industries within commercial recreation have also shown substantial increases. For example, in 1981, the theme park industry had nearly double the attendance population of professional football, baseball, and basketball combined. It accounted for an average annual attendance of 170 million

people. In 1972, 24% of the population of the United States reported visiting a theme park at least once. This had increased by 1977 to 73% of the population. Of the 508 amusement facilities currently in the U.S., the 40 major parks grossed over 750 million dollars in 1977.

Another aspect of the commercial recreation field is the travel and tourism industry. This industry has grown so large that in 1983 visitor and convention bureaus spent 161 1/2 million dollars to bring conventions and visitors to their cities. In 1984, it is estimated that state agencies of travel and tourism will spend 130 million dollars in an attempt to lure tourists to their states. In fact, in 1981, travel and tourism accounted for more jobs in the U.S. than any other private industry except health care services. This placed the industry as the top source of jobs in 13 states and in the top 3 job sources in 39 other states. Between 1981 and 1982, the travel and tourism industry created an additional 39,000 new jobs in the U.S., increaseing the states that ranked travel and tourism as number one to 18 out of 52 and placeing it in the top 3 in 38 states. In fact, total traveler spending in 1982 had increased to 194 billion dollars and was responsible for 4 1/2 million jobs.

Travel agencies have increased at the rate of 10% per year from 1970 to 1981. Gross bookings are up 18% or 31 billion dollars a year. In Las Vegas, travel and tourism has become so profitable that the Las Vegas travel and tourism

bureau contributed over 1/2 million dollars to the Clark Country Parks and Recreation Department during the 1982-83 fiscal year to help with the development of recreational facilities for residents (Las Vegas Marketing, 1983.)

Travel and tourism has become so important in the United States that a recent survey done by Knapp Communications Corporation asking, "How do you use your discretionary income?" received a response indicating that 74% used their discretionary income for vacation trips of one week duration or more. Vacation by car was reported by 46% and recreation or entertainment was listed by 18%. Out of the top 6 responses to this question, the three just listed ranked 1, 2, and 6 respectively (Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, Sept., 1983.) Some other industries that have shown substantial increases in recent years have been the boating industry, which accounted for 3 billion dollars in equipment purchases in 1981, and a total expenditure including gas and supplies of 8 billion dollars. Motorcyclists purchased two billion dollars of equipment and spent a total of 4 1/2 billion dollars on their activities in 1981. Skiing has increased by 6 1/2 times, golf has increased 3 times and sailing is up 3 times from 1960 to 1981 (Crandall, 1983.) These are all examples of commercial recreation enterprises that have grown rapidly.

From the economic standpoint alone, it is easy to see that commercial recreation is a major industry in the U.S.

economy. Not only from the number of jobs it creates, but from the total revenue which accounted for approximately 9% of the gross national product of the U.S. in 1981. This country would be in a much worse economic position if it were not for commercial recreation. Commercial recreation is not only a provider of ways to use unobligated time, it is also an important source of jobs within the U.S. economy.

Does commercial recreation provide activities for family recreation within the U.S.? Let me point out a few of the most recent facts and let you draw your own conclusions. We have talked about the skiing industry which has increased substantially in the last 20 years. The demographics provided by Ski Magazine's 1983 survey indicated that just over 70% of the respondents had more than 2 people within their household who skied, indicating that skiing is a family sport. In fact, a total of three people within any one family accounted for 14.7% of the responses and four people in the family accounted for an additional 13.2%.

We have talked about the travel and tourism industry as being a major contributor to the commercial recreation field. Recent studies by the state of Michigan (1983) indicate that families stopping at their information centers accounted for 80% of the resident traveler and 82% of the non-resident traveler. The Las Vegas example showed how commercial recreation is providing revenue to municipal recreation. Las Vegas is not considered a family destination

area. However a recent survey by the visitor's bureau for Las Vegas (1983) indicated that 58% of the parties arriving in Las Vegas consisted of 2 people. This could be construed as husband and wife or a "family." However only 6% of the visitors brought their children. Forty-two percent of the summer visitors to Las Vegas indicated that Las Vegas should cater to families with children while 37% of the fall visitors agreed (Las Vegas Visitor and Convention Bureau, Dec., 1983.)

A study of married couples who have children, who attend the Salt Lake City hockey team games have indicated that 75% of them took their children along to the hockey games (Amicone, 1981.) Other articles have indicated that virtually all ski resorts near the New York metropolitan area offer some type of facilities for small child care. These types of programs have been included in other resorts such as the Kinderkim program at Snowmass which offers daycare and ski instruction to children as young as 1 1/2 (Salt Lake Tribune, 1984.)

Theme parks, the current version of the amusement resorts that were spoken of in the early 1900's, are another example of family recreation areas. A quote by Richard Nunis Director of Disney World, in Forture, (1977) indicated that the 43 square mile Disney World "is not just a theme park, but a family recreation center." In fact, there is one commonality of all theme parks, "their paramount goal is to

provide family entertainment through allusions, and "family" invariably means including a mix of attractions that will appeal to people of all ages" (Fortune, 1977.) If you look at any theme park you will note that the mix allows for very young children to shake paws with costumed Mickey Mouses, Bugs Bunnies and Yogi Bears while teenagers and adults line up for the rides and grandparents browse among the shops (Forbes, 1977) in what is truly a family recreation center.

Resorts are another strong commercial recreation link in the tourism industry.April, 1982 Parents Magazine indicated that the resort industry had one of its best years in 1980 thanks to a loyal family following. It indicated that facilities at resorts catered to children by including hay rides, zoo trips, swimming lessons, craft lessons, rock climbing, children's beaches, pools, playgrounds and separate parent and child seating at meals. In fact, the family market has become so strong that the Club Med which was long known for its swinging singles lifestyle has recently opened four villages called Med Mini Clubs for children aged four to 11 and parents are encouraged to bring children with them on vacations (Changing Times, 1983.)

Even the "cruise industry" has realized the need to provide for family recreation. Cruises are no longer the bastion of wealthy, elderly individuals looking for a way to spend some time, nor do they provide the swinging singles lifestyle as portrayed by the television show, "Love Boat."

A March, 1984, article in Better Homes and Gardens was devoted to the "best buys" in family vacation cruises. These included one week sailing trips, voyages close to home and a section on how to select the proper ship and cut costs while on vacation.

Given these statistics and information can you still honestly say that commercial recreation is an inappropriate form of recreation? In reality, commercial recreation is one of the most profitable and most often copied forms of recreational enterprises in the United States. Not only is it a viable source of revenue and jobs for the individuals and the U. S. economy, it is a major provider of family recreational activities. With these numbers and the historical facts, I hope that you will agree with me that commercial recreation should not be eliminated, but be cultivated and encouraged within our society.

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